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Subject: Bark Beetle Activity at Four Sites on the Tres Piedras Ranger Distict

To: Ernesto Hurtado, Tres Piedras Ranger District

At the request of Len Scuffham, Acting Timber Staff Officer, Carson National Forest Supervisor's Office, on September 10, 2002, Debra Allen-Reid, New Mexico Zone Leader; Dave Conklin, Pathologist, Forest Health, New Mexico Zone; and I visited four areas on the Tres Piedras RD. Len wanted us to look at the bark beetle activity occurring at these sites. Len and David Lawrence, Forester, El Rito RD, accompanied us. Anatacio Valdez, Forestry Tech, Tres Piedras RD, also assisted us at the first site we examined. Following is a brief summary of our observations:

Wildland Urban Interface Thinning Project Area

This site consisted of a ponderosa pine stand, which was recently thinned as part of the wildland-urban interface fuels reduction project. District staff became concerned when trees began dying (fading) after the thinning activities were completed. Our examination revealed that some of the upper tree crowns were dying from the top down. Ips engraver beetles (possibly *Ips latidens* or *Ips pini*) characteristically attack the upper branches, limbs, and stem of stressed pines. Upon completing development, these bark beetles emerge and attack the lower branches and limbs of the tree. To verify the cause of this mortality, we felled two fading pines and found the upper crown to be infested with ips beetles. The slash piles in the area were small, and the limbs were within recommended maximum diameters, so it was unclear at first how sufficient brood had developed to attack the standing trees. However, the mystery was solved when Len recalled that two large trees were felled between the road and fence and, due to Forest closure, could not be removed for a few months. These logs would have provided excellent bark beetle habitat and were most likely the source of infestation. Fuelwood gathers have since removed this material. Because only the branches, limbs and upper stem of the trees dropped were infested with ips beetles, we suggested the lower uninfested stem be removed from the site and the upper portion be lopped and scattered to dry out in the sun.

Proposed Piñon/Juniper Thinning Area

The next site examined was a piñon/juniper stand proposed for thinning later this fall. There was concern that thinning now might trigger an ips beetle outbreak. This is an excellent piñon site, with many large, healthy trees. Since we did not detect any significant bark beetle activity in this area, we suggested the District move ahead with this thinning operation, provided the activity is completed within the next two months and that all slash four inches and greater in diameter be removed from the site as soon as possible.

Survey Line Near Carson, NM

We also examined several ips beetle-killed piñons along a Forest Service boundary near Carson, NM. When conducting the boundary survey, the survey crew had pruned overhanging limbs from several of the piñons along the boundary line. These trees were later attacked and killed by piñon ips beetles. We suspect the wounds on these trees attracted the bark beetles to them. Several other drought-stressed piñons were also attacked and killed at this site.

Fuelwood Allotment Area

Len next wanted us to look at a fuelwood thinning area located at the southeastern end of the District. Although this fuelwood area was just recently closed, Len was thinking of reopening the area to create additional wildlife openings. We agreed that certain areas were still in need of thinning. However, because piñon ips beetles are currently at epidemic levels in this area, we recommended that further thinning activities be postponed until this bark beetle outbreak collapses.

If you have any questions concerning this site visit, please call me at (505) 842-3287 or email me at trogers@fs.fed.us.

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cc: Len Scuffham, David E Lawrence, Leonard Lucero, Debra Allen-Reid, Regis Cassidy, Douglas L Parker, John Anhold